

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Kristopher W. Berry, #347006,) C/A No. 4:13-648-RMG-BHH
)
Plaintiff,)
)
vs.)
) Report and Recommendation
Kendall Renee Burch, Esquire, sued in her individual)
and official capacity,)
)
Defendant.)
)

The plaintiff, Kristopher W. Berry, (Plaintiff), proceeding *pro se*, brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.¹ Plaintiff is an prisoner at Evans Correctional Institution in Bennettsville, South Carolina, and files this action *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915.² The Complaint names as Defendant the solicitor in his criminal case. Plaintiff seeks monetary damages. The Complaint should be dismissed as Defendant is not amenable to suit.

Pro Se and In Forma Pauperis Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* Complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915; 28 U.S.C. § 1915A; and the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996). This review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989);

¹ Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. §636(b)(1)(B), and Local Rule 73.02(B)(2)(d), D.S.C., the undersigned is authorized to review such complaints for relief and submit findings and recommendations to the District Court.

² Title 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (a) requires review of a “complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity.”

Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); *Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr.*, 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995) (*en banc*); *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983).

The Complaint herein has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action “fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted” or is “frivolous or malicious.” § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i), (ii). A finding of frivolity can be made where the complaint “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. at 31. Hence, under § 1915(e)(2)(B), a claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed *sua sponte*. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319 (1989); *Allison v. Kyle*, 66 F.3d 71 (5th Cir. 1995).

This Court is required to liberally construe *pro se* documents, *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97 (1976), holding them to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, *Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. 9 (1980) (*per curiam*). Even under this less stringent standard, however, the *pro se* Complaint is subject to summary dismissal. The mandated liberal construction afforded to *pro se* pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so, but a district court may not rewrite a petition to include claims that were never presented, *Barnett v. Hargett*, 174 F.3d 1128, 1133 (10th Cir. 1999), or construct the plaintiff's legal arguments for him, *Small v. Endicott*, 998 F.2d 411, 417-18 (7th Cir. 1993), or “conjure up questions never squarely presented” to the court, *Beaudett v. City of Hampton*, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985). The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently

cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387, (4th Cir. 1990).

Background and Discussion

Plaintiff names as Defendant in this case the prosecutor in his criminal conviction, for which he is now incarcerated. Plaintiff complains Defendant Kendall Renee Burch falsified evidence and encouraged a witness to perjure herself in order to obtain the conviction. As Defendant enjoys prosecutorial immunity, this case should be summarily dismissed at this stage in the proceedings. See *Siegert v. Gilley*, 500 U.S. 226 (1991) (immunity presents a threshold question which should be resolved before discovery is even allowed); and *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 526 (1985) (absolute immunity "is an immunity from suit rather than a mere defense to liability").

In South Carolina, regional prosecutors are called Solicitors and Assistant Solicitors. See S.C. Const., art. V, § 24; S.C. Code Ann, § 1-7-310. Solicitors are elected by voters of a judicial circuit and have absolute immunity for activities in or connected with judicial proceedings, such as a criminal trial, bond hearings, grand jury proceedings, pre-trial "motions" hearings, and ancillary civil proceedings. See *Buckley v. Fitzsimmons*, 509 U.S. 259 (1993); *Burns v. Reed*, 500 U.S. 478 (1991).

It is well settled in this circuit that prosecutors are absolutely immune from liability for damages based on their decisions about "whether and when to prosecute," *Lyles v. Sparks*, 79 F. 3d 372, 377(4th Cir. 1996), and whether or not to go forward with a prosecution. See *Springmen v. Williams*, 122 F. 3d 211, 212-13 (4th Cir. 1997). Such decisions are purely prosecutorial functions and they are absolutely immune from Plaintiff's claims. Plaintiff is not entitled to recover any damages from Defendant based on her

performance of these functions. Moreover, at least three other circuits have found that absolute immunity extends to actions taken by a prosecutor while negotiating a plea. See *Cole v. Smith*, 188 F.3d 506, slip-op at 1 (Table, No. 97-5964)(6th Cir. 1999); *Ferrer v. Daily*, 104 F.3d 367, slip-op at 1(Table, No. 96-3155)(10th Cir. 1996); *Pinaud v. County of Suffolk*, 52 F.3d 1139, 1149 (2d Cir.1995).

Recommendation

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the Complaint in the above-captioned case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. See *United Mine Workers v. Gibbs*, 383 U.S. 715 (1966); see also *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972). Plaintiff's attention is directed to the important notice on the next page.

March 15, 2013
Charleston, South Carolina

s/Bruce Howe Hendricks
United States Magistrate Judge

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); see Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
Post Office Box 835
Charleston, South Carolina 29402

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).